



WHAT DO YOU WANT?

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NEEDS AND DESIRES

Here in the West, we tend to confuse the words “want” and “need.” We are fortunate to live in an unprecedented time of physical abundance and freedom. The hungry amongst us are sated, the cold amongst us are warm, and the afraid amongst us are secure. Yet we have become preoccupied with our unfilled desires—the countless things we absolutely “need”!

There is a simple trick to distinguishing between wants and needs: Needs never change. If I need to eat, I will always need to eat. If I need to be healthy, I will always need to be healthy. Desires, on the other hand, are constantly evolving. It’s like the horizon—you reach it and it moves.

When we confuse wants and needs, we are never happy, because what we have is never enough.

The Alter Rebbe categorizes the basic needs of every human being as *banim* (children), *chayah* (health), and *parnassah* (livelihood). If a person is lacking one of these essentials, it can feel impossible to be joyful. But if a *chossid* is lacking one of these essentials, he has a double dilemma— (1) the issue itself, and (2) the fact that he can’t serve Hashem with joy.

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In Chapter 26 of *Tanya*, the Alter Rebbe addresses such a *chossid*.

Not all problems can be solved.

Some problems take a long time to be resolved.

But until the resolution is found (or if G-d forbid it can't be found), the Alter Rebbe wants to help us develop a mindset that will allow us to be joyful from within the darkness.

His answer boils down to this: You need to trust G-d more. You need *bitachon*.

WHY DO GOOD PEOPLE SUFFER?

Before we explore the Alter Rebbe's answer further, let's detour to discuss one of the greatest theological questions of all times: Why does G-d allow good people to suffer?

Red Sadya Gaon was one of the first brilliant Jewish philosophers. He grappled with this question and came to the conclusion that good people suffer because this physical life is brief and the afterlife is eternal. We suffer temporarily to become worthy of a spiritually blissful infinity. In addition, the more one suffers in this world, the greater his reward in the World to Come.

Several generations later, the Rambam came to a different conclusion. He said human beings do not see the world clearly. Our vision is skewed. There is so much good in the world, but we are conditioned to see the bad. Most of us don't wake up feeling fortunate for all we have. Instead, we feel anxious about all that we lack. Of course, the Rambam acknowledges there *is* suffering in this world. We all have hardships. But most of the problems we have are problems we brought onto ourselves. Fewer of our problems are brought on by society. And the fewest of our problems are a result of the fact that we live in a physical world, imperfect by definition, so there are things like illnesses and natural disasters.

The Rambam's conclusion is that life is not perfect, but we need to step outside of our human condition of misery to recognize the goodness around us and within our own lives. This paradigm shift will make us happier people. The Rebbe adopted this view. He told us this world is a garden. Yes, it needs to be tended, but it is a beautiful place.

Internalizing this worldview is step one. Step two is developing *bitachon*.

BITACHON MAKES MIRACLES

Bitachon is saying, “Aibershter, I know everything you do is for my good. So even though this challenge is devastating, I trust you that it is the best for me. No matter what is happening, I will remain calm and joyful.” This is a remarkably high level. We want our lives to be good by *our* definition. But it is not insanity or denial. It takes courage and strength to be *mekabel yisurim b’ahavah*, to accept our hardships with love.

Having *bitachon*, at the very least, keeps us in a positive mental space instead of a negative one. At the very best, *bitachon* actually brings about a better outcome.

The Ateres Zvi (Reb Zvi Hirsh of Zidichov, 1763-1831) had a son who was dying. The

whole family was already in mourning, but the Ateres Zvi kept working. He was a Rebbe and he had a lot to do. *Chassidim* kept running into his office, saying, “Your son is dying any minute now! Come quickly to say goodbye!” He ignored them. Finally, when his son was virtually on his last breath, the *chassidim* decided they needed to knock some sense into their Rebbe. If he was planning on making a miracle, it was now or never. They decided to send a young boy, the Ateres Zvi’s nephew, to break the news.

The young boy walked into the Rebbe’s room and said, “Uncle, I have terrific news! Your son is feeling much better. He just needs a *refuah shelaimah*, a *brachah* from you, to be completely healed.”

Hearing this, the Ateres Zvi stood up from



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The mashpia gave me a pat on the back and said, “Don’t worry, the Alter Rebbe would never write such a letter to you.”

his desk, took a jar from a shelf, and handed it to the boy. He said, “Take this spice, boil it with water, and give it to my son to drink.”

A short time later, a *seudas hoda’ah* was held to celebrate the child’s miraculous recovery. The *chassidim* asked the Ateres Zvi why he had not cured his son earlier, during one of the numerous times they had tried to tell him the end was near. He told them, “You all walked in with such dark moods, you were killing him with negativity. There was nothing I could do to help. Finally, someone walked in with a little faith in G-d, just a drop of trust, and I finally had something to work with to make a miracle.” *Bitachon* creates the space for a miracle to occur.

TRUTH HURTS

Hashem has two options with every human being. He can be honest with you, or He can be nice to you.

If we could pick, we would all pick that Hashem should be nice to us. Truth hurts. But we don’t get to choose; Hashem does.

Imagine a student goes to school and gets a 65 on his test. The teacher gives him a pat on his back and says, “It’s okay; maybe you’ll do better next time.” The teacher is being “nice.” But it is not true kindness. True kindness is honesty. If a teacher really believes in the student, he will push him to excel. He will challenge the student to bring out his full potential.

The people Hashem loves the most are the ones He is the most honest with. Sometimes His honesty is brutal. But the people who receive Hashem’s honesty now, experiencing it in the darkness of *galus*, will step out of the shadows when Moshiach comes and experience Hashem’s ultimate light.

There is a short letter at the end of *Tanya* that is

painful to read. It’s written from the Alter Rebbe to one of his *chassidim*; we don’t know who he was or where he lived. But two things become apparent when you read the letter: (1) This *chossid* had an extremely difficult life, and (2) he was on an incredibly high spiritual level, so the Alter Rebbe felt he could be honest with him.

The Alter Rebbe writes, “Are you from the *eirev rav*, the people who think G-d is only semi-controlling the world? Or do you believe G-d is fully in charge? If you believe Hashem is controlling every aspect of the world, how can you complain when it hurts?”

When I read this letter as a *bachur*, I thought to myself, “Alter Rebbe! Some sensitivity, please!” I went to my *mashpia* and asked him how the Alter Rebbe could write such a letter to a *chossid*. The *mashpia* gave me a pat on the back and said, “Don’t worry, the Alter Rebbe would never write such a letter to you.”

But the Alter Rebbe was (and is) talking to us. At any moment, each of us has within us the strength to see the world and life for what it really is: Hashem’s world.

In more familiar words, *tracht gut vet zein gut* (Yiddish for *bitachon*) is real. But it is only real when we take it upon ourselves, when we internalize it and apply it, rather than having it dictated to us.

Because the Alter Rebbe expected this level of *bitachon* from his *chossid*, it also gave him the strength to achieve it.

That same strength has been given to each of us. ❄

This article was transcribed and edited by Musia Kaplan from tapes of Rabbi Paltiel’s classes. Women are invited to come learn Chassidus with Rabbi Yossi Paltiel in person. Rabbi Paltiel gives two Chassidus classes Sunday mornings in the 770 women’s section, one beginning at 11 a.m. (Tanya) and one beginning at 11:50 a.m. (Hayom Yom). To check on these classes or for any other information, email info@insidechassidus.org.